historic sites within Jasper National Park. Given the productive results of the 1995 field work, it was decided that the primary focus of training activities would be continuing the excavations begun by the Snake Indian River Threatened Sites Project, focusing on the aforementioned stratified prehistoric campsite (Francis and Hudecek-Cuffe 1996). The physical context of the study area is excellent for teaching the principles of stratigraphic excavation; 15 one by one metre units were excavated, with each student being responsible for their own unit.

Conclusions concerning the number of discrete occupations and their component assemblages await more detailed lithic analysis and correlation with the radiocarbon-dated stratigraphy of the site. Toward that end, one of the graduate student teaching assistants attached to the field school has agreed to utilize the data from this project to serve as the basis for graduate thesis research. This collaborative effort between Parks Canada and the University of Alberta is planned to continue over the next two years. The field school project has provided many benefits to all those involved with this partnership. The field school participants contribute directly to the acquisition of new archaeological information and problem solving which can be applied to the management of archaeological resources. In addition to serving as a vehicle for academic undergraduate degree training and advanced degree research, the field school project is proving to be an effective means to meet the Parks Canada mandate of protecting threatened historically significant heritage resources within Jasper National Park.

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Life on the Edge

The Cultural Value of Disappearing Sites

The name Parks Canada has long been synonymous with an extensive system of National Parks well known for their natural beauty and diversity of wildlife. Less publicized, however, is Parks Canada's role as custodian of cultural resources, both within Canada's National Parks and National Historic Sites. Since the organization's inception over 100 years ago, a variety of policies has been developed to provide guidelines for the management of those cultural resources. These guidelines have traditionally been discipline-specific, depending on the training of the people who produced them. Thus, cultural resources have been managed in accordance with archaeological, curatorial and built heritage guidelines. It wasn't until the early 1990s that the development of an official Cultural Resource Management Policy provided the first agency-wide guidelines for all cultural resources on lands administered by Parks Canada.

These new guidelines provide Parks staff with a means to ensure the protection and presentation of Canada's cultural resources. It also provides a kind of framework to help managers define where the importance of those cultural resources lies and forces them to evaluate proposed actions which would have an impact upon those values. As the CRM policy becomes a part of daily operational decisions, managers are re-examining actions which once would have been taken as a matter of course. In the process, some interesting situations with broader implications have come to light.

One such example involves a small property in rural Saskatchewan, where rapid erosion by the North Saskatchewan River has been exposing cultural resources at the site of a former fur trade post for decades. In 1995, Parks Canada archaeologists were asked to visit the site for the purposes of salvaging any resources in immediate danger and assessing the extent of the resources remaining. In the process, it was discovered that the fort itself has been completely lost to erosion, and that only minimal evidence of historic activity remains. This raises the interesting question of whether a site that has effectively lost its physical cultural resources continues to have cultural value.

Historical Background

Sturgeon Fort, also known as "Peter Pond National Historic Site," is located on the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River west of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. A cobblestone cairn at the location of the fort commemorates Peter Pond, a Connecticut native who travelled north early in his career and became a notorious figure in the North American fur trade. Built in 1776, this was the first of the posts established by Pond and was occupied by a number of independent traders until its destruction in 1780. The fort occupies a unique place in fur trade history, as it was established at a time when the rivalry for furs between independent traders and the Hudson's Bay Company was intensifying. The first trading post to be constructed on the North Saskatchewan River, it was on the edge of fur trade expansion northwest into an unknown country whose resources were largely untapped.

Local interest in Sturgeon Fort has been high since the fort came to public attention in the 1940s. Several excavations have taken place, the most extensive in 1966 under the direction of Norman Barka. Barka successfully located the subsurface remains of several of the fort's buildings and a rich variety of artifacts related to its occupation, despite its short occupation and the damage which has occurred since its abandonment. Although housed at the College of William and Mary in Virginia since their excavation, these artifacts have recently been repatriated. Their re-analysis, after 30 years, has provided considerable additional insight into Sturgeon Fort's place in the early fur trade history of the northwest.

Excavation units along the North Saskatchewan River at Peter Pond NHS.

The property which is the subject of this discussion did not come under federal jurisdiction by virtue of being the location of a fur trade post. Rather, in 1951 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recommended that Peter Pond be commemorated as a nationally significant person. At that time, the board also advised that a monument to Pond be erected at the site of Sturgeon Fort, his first trading post. This recommendation has resulted, over the years, in a significant misunderstanding regarding the focus of the commemoration and the status of the property on which the HSMBC cairn and the remains of the fort are located. Sturgeon Fort itself is not the focus of the ministerial designation, and the property on which it sits has never been designated a National Historic Site. However, soon after its purchase, Parks Canada administrators and HSMBC officials alike began referring to the property in correspondence as a national historic site. This was the perhaps predictable outcome of Parks Canada's traditional concern with real property management and its responsibilities with regard to this particular parcel of land, which included cairn upkeep and grounds maintenance. Thus, as early as 1953, "the Peter Pond cairn" rapidly became "Peter Pond National Historic Site," and the implicit belief in the property's national historic significance was entrenched.

The "National Historic Site" misnomer has, in recent years, had significant implications with regard to Parks Canada's responsibility for the extant cultural resources on this property. Parks Canada's CRM Policy stipulates that steps will be taken to achieve the commemorative integrity of National Historic Sites by both protecting them and ensuring that the reasons for their national significance are communicated to the public. In the process of reviewing the commemorative intent of a number of Saskatchewan sites, the mistaken belief, perpetuated over four decades, that the land surrounding the Peter Pond commemorative cairn was a National Historic Site was revealed. Clarification of the property's status helps to define site administrators' responsibilities with regard to presentation of its extant cultural resources, but leaves the issue of how to deal with the site's impending destruction by the North Saskatchewan River unresolved.

Over the years, longstanding management issues have developed surrounding Sturgeon Fort.

The property on which the commemorative cairn and the remains of the fort are located was bought by the federal government in 1953 for the sum of $50. At the time of its acquisition, the property was 78.8 m deep along its western boundary and 36.4 m deep along its east. Located on a sharp bend in the North Saskatchewan River, the site has been legally surveyed three times since 1951. These surveys indicate that, between 1954 and 1995, 34 m of shoreline were lost, primarily along the western half of the property where erosion is proceeding most rapidly. This rapid shift in the river's position led Norman Barka to speculate that Sturgeon Fort originally stood several hundred feet north of the North Saskatchewan River, and that the remains excavated in 1962 represented only a remnant of the original, which he considered largely destroyed.

Adding to the damage caused by nature, the human damage to Sturgeon Fort has also been significant. Situated just 6 km from a sizeable urban centre, it has proved to be an attractive location for visitors in search of alternative forms of recreation. There is no custodial presence on the site, as it is administered from Batoche National Historic Site, more than an hour's drive away. Consequently, a site caretaker must be retained to clean up large accumulations of garbage (mostly beer bottles) on a regular basis, and repair vandalized fences, gates and signs. The property has also suffered at the hands of local artifact collectors, who cheerfully admit to many enjoyable afternoons at the site with a shovel and, sometimes, a metal detector.

Continuing erosion over the past three decades has resulted in the destruction of even the limited remains which survived in 1962. Systematic testing of the property at 5 m intervals and full-scale excavation along the top of the eroding river bank in 1995 uncovered little evidence of cultural material related to the fort's occupation, yielding only 10 fragments of Native ceramic, a wrought nail, a piece of lead shot, an iron projectile point and 375 small pieces of highly fragmented animal bone. No features, structural or otherwise, were identified, and attempts to locate the palisade at the rear of the fort were unfruitful. Based on the limited cultural remains found, it appears that Sturgeon Fort itself has been entirely destroyed by erosion and that the remaining resources represent a limited activity area outside the fort proper.

The Intangible Qualities of Historic Places

In view of the destruction of Sturgeon Fort and the inevitable loss of the remaining property, one might begin to wonder whether the site has any value remaining as a cultural resource. It is in addressing such questions that Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management policy prompts us to consider whether the property on which the cairn now sits has "value" quite apart from simply being the location of a cairn commemorating a famous individual. If so, where does the value lie? Not, presumably, in any physical resources present on the site; as has been noted, any structures belonging to Sturgeon Fort proper have been completely destroyed. The handful of bone fragments remaining can hardly be considered representative of the former site or add any more to our understanding of the post than is already known. However, most visitors to our historic sites will acknowledge that many of these places have intangible qualities as well—a kind of spirit of place that helps people identify with the place and appreciate the reasons for its significance. At Sturgeon Fort, one can easily look out over the high banks of the North Saskatchewan River and imagine canoes laden with trade goods rowing into sight after their long and arduous journey from the distribution depots on the Great Lakes. Could this same spirit of place be evoked in another, similar location? Or does the knowledge that the viewer is looking along the same sight lines at the same landscape seen by Peter Pond and his colleagues over 200 years ago add an additional component to the visitor experience? Sensitivity to such considerations is vital in the responsible management of cultural resources, and requires a certain level of knowledge regarding an object or a place's history. In the case of special places, we must be aware of their connections, past or present, to the larger society, rather than viewing them simply as administrative or operational entities.

Sturgeon Fort played a brief but important role in the early North American fur trade. The destruction of the fort by natural processes has raised important questions regarding the intrinsic value of the remaining property. Regardless of peoples' individual responses to these questions, the fact that they are being asked at all is a major step forward in our understanding and treatment of cultural resources. A decade ago, management decisions regarding this property would likely have been based upon little more than the presence or absence of the actual fort remains. With the trend toward a broader, more holistic consideration of what constitutes value, we see that the answers to these questions are not as self-evident as they might once have appeared. By applying this holistic approach on a daily basis to any decisions regarding the cultural resources in our care, we ensure their continuing protection. And by identifying the intangible values of a place as well as the tangible, we are able to provide the public with a more realistic, evocative experience and a greater understanding of its significance.

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